



from research to reality

BRIEF

RESEARCH
DEVELOPMENT
&
TECHNOLOGY
TRANSFER

How Are We Doing?

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation provides a wide variety of services and programs, ranging from issuing driver licenses to rehabilitating state highways to traffic enforcement. In deciding the best way to deliver these services, WisDOT must consider fiscal constraints and competing objectives. Knowing what services customers think are the most important and how they rate existing services is very helpful for planning the future of the organization.

What's the Problem?

Although feedback mechanisms are in place for some customer groups, WisDOT currently has no formal mechanism for measuring the general public's satisfaction with our products and services. This puts a burden on individual units of the organization to plan for customer needs and react to customer complaints. In addition, without a single measure of how the department is doing overall, WisDOT lacks an important tool for use in strategic decision-making and budget and resource allocation.

Research Objectives

To address this problem, WisDOT initiated a study to develop a customer satisfaction survey mechanism. Objectives included analysis of existing WisDOT customer satisfaction measures, identification of best practices nationwide, development of a set of customer satisfaction measures and data-collection mechanisms, and identification of an analysis framework.

Study Results

1) **Evaluation of current WisDOT measures.** The researchers conducted focus group sessions with the department's board of directors and interviewed key decision makers in each division. They found that existing measures of customer satisfaction within WisDOT tend toward ad hoc or qualitative research with few proactive, statistically sound measures of customer satisfaction. This results in a lack of consistent quantitative data that can be compared across divisions and over time.

2) **Review of best practices.** The consultants found that although it is common for state transportation agencies to measure service quality, no state measures customer priorities across divisions. Developing department-wide measures of service quality and importance would be a unique undertaking.

3) **Development of a customer satisfaction mechanism.** In developing the customer satisfaction survey instrument for WisDOT, the consultants conducted four focus groups with Wisconsin state residents. These qualitative studies were useful for identifying the factors or components of customer satisfaction that the department would be interested in measuring. Participants for these focus groups were recruited through telephone interviews.

Based on the initial goals of the study and the focus group findings, the following types of interaction were identified as being of primary interest to WisDOT customers:

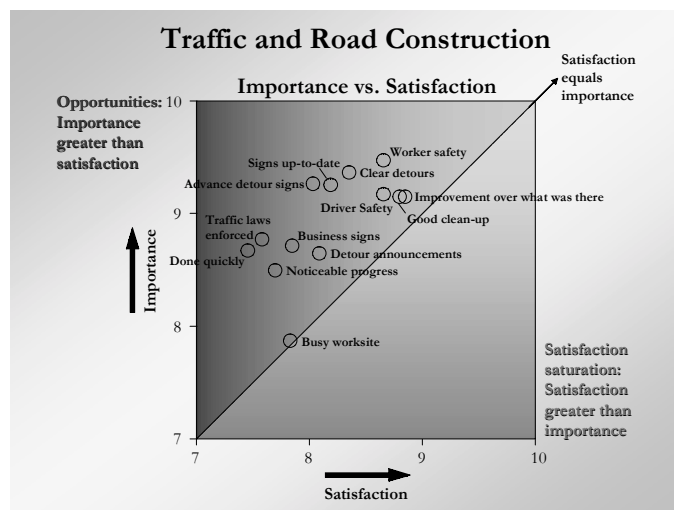
- Contact with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) in person
- Contact with DMV by phone, mail or on-line
- Encountering state highway construction or maintenance while driving
- Receiving motorist assistance by the State Patrol
- Being stopped by the State Patrol for a traffic violation
- Owning property or residing in a community affected by state highway construction

The telephone survey that was created seeks respondents who have had any of the above experiences in the previous six months. Survey participants would be questioned about only one of the six possible experiences. Participants would be asked to rate the importance of the relevant factors of satisfaction and then rate their satisfaction with each factor during a recent encounter.

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**The Wisconsin
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A gap analysis that plots satisfaction versus importance can reveal important relationships in the survey results, as shown in the sample graph at right.



“This kind of department-wide survey could help WisDOT monitor customer needs in a direct and systematic way—and help us address the areas of greatest need.”

- John Nordbo,
WisDOT Office of
Organizational
Development Services

The purpose of this survey structure is to develop a gap analysis comparing what customers feel is important against how well they think WisDOT performs. The “gap” is the difference between the importance rating and the satisfaction rating. In each section, respondents would also be asked a forced-choice question in which they are required to prioritize two major service goals. The subjects of these questions and the attributes on which WisDOT would be rated were developed from the focus group findings.

To test this new customer satisfaction mechanism, the consultants conducted a pilot study consisting of a telephone survey with 300 randomly selected Wisconsin residents. This survey instrument performed extremely well, and the researchers recommend it for use in a large-scale on-going customer satisfaction initiative.

Implementation

To integrate the survey mechanism into department-wide decision-making, the consultants recommend: (1) integrating the timeline for data collection and analysis with the timing of the department’s strategic plan and budget processes; (2) linking the survey to other department-wide measures and strategic priorities and integrating it with data from other department surveys; (3) conducting the survey at least biennially (preferably annually); and (4) establishing a communications plan to report survey results.

WisDOT staff are currently researching the most cost-effective method for implementing the new mechanism. Because WisDOT does not store phone numbers of all customers, identifying a sample group to survey by phone could prove challenging and costly. In spite of this, the department is considering implementation of the survey tool, even with the use of randomly selected phone numbers, if needed, in 2003.

Benefits of This Research

The customer satisfaction survey tool developed in this study provides an effective measure of the general public’s satisfaction with WisDOT’s products and services. The advantage of using one customer satisfaction instrument for the entire department is that it offers a consistent way of collecting and analyzing data. Having access to this data will aid the department in aligning with what customers want and learning how to address their concerns.

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Develop a
Mechanism to
Measure Customer
Satisfaction with the
Products and
Services of the
Department

0092-02-07

October 2002

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